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THE MANUSCRIPTS OF THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

Dr. John Koch's recently published study of the relationship of the manuscripts of Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*¹ was evidently made in ignorance of a similar study of mine presented as a doctoral dissertation at Princeton in 1914 and, after some reworking, published in the spring of 1918.² As a result we have two independent studies of a problem which had been investigated before but which for various reasons³ had never given the impression of having been satisfactorily settled. That the problem is not a simple one is further evident from the differences in the conclusions which Koch and I arrive at, differences which can best be shown by the accompanying stemmas.

A comparison of the two stemmas shows that Koch and I differ in three respects, viz., as regards the relation of "k" to the other MSS., in our interpretation of the significance of so-called 'contamination' in most of the MSS., and in our conjectures regarding the nature of the hypothetical "A." Let us consider the points in the order named—which is also the order of their importance.

1. The position of "k" on the stemma

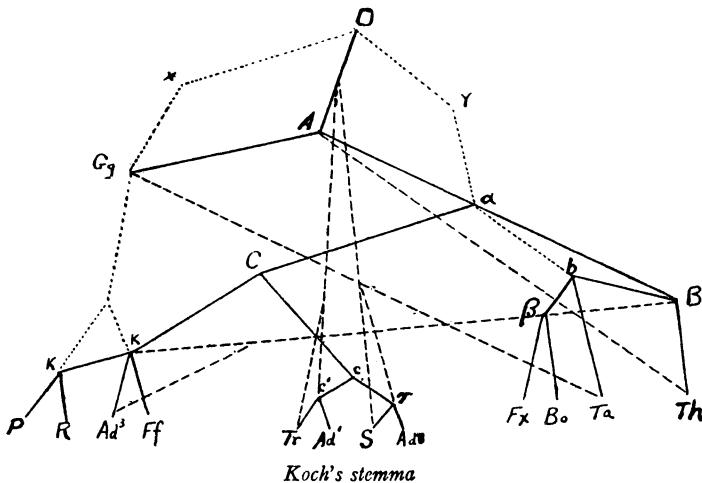
The difficulty of reconstructing *k* arises from the fragmentary character of the MSS. At no point do the texts of the four MSS. run parallel. The text of Ff breaks off where that of R begins and can be compared with the texts of Ad³ and P in only 116 lines. Furthermore, the texts of P, R, and Ad³ run parallel for less than 300 lines. Yet the fragments furnish sufficient evidence to warrant grouping them as Koch and I do and (though Koch and I do not agree) to establish their relationship as a group to the other MSS.

Koch's evidence for connecting *k* with *c* is to my mind decidedly inconclusive. He advances no evidence of readings in which the *k* MSS. as a group agree in error with those of *c*.

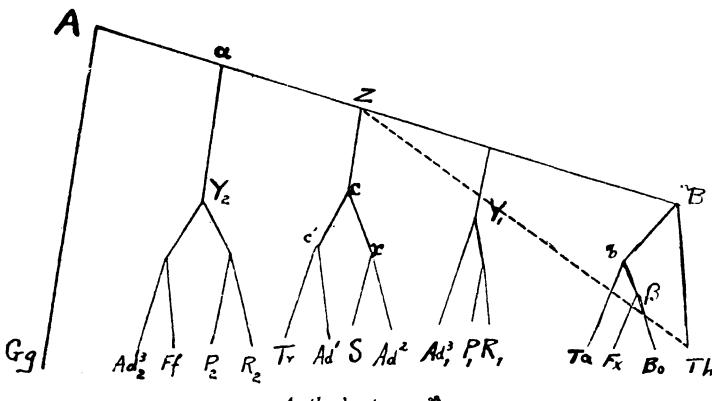
¹ *Anglia Zeitschrift für Englische Philologie*, XLIII, 197 ff, and XLIV, 23 ff.

² *The text of Chaucer's Legend of Good Women*, Princeton University Press, 1918.

³ See *Preface* to my dissertation.



Die punktierten linien nach x und y deuten nur vermutungsweise aufgestellte beziehungen an, die andern die im folgenden nachgewiesenen kontaminationen, bei denen jedoch noch zwischenstufen mehr oder weniger wahrscheinlich sind.



Y is a composite. Y₁ consists of the *Prologue* and lines 1250 (cir.)—end; Y₂ of lines 580–1250 (cir.).

EXPLANATION OF ABBREVIATIONS

Gg —Cambridge University Library, MS. Gg. 4. 27.

Tr —Trinity College, Cambridge, MS. R. 3. 19.

S —MS. Arch. Selden, B. 24. Bodleian.

^a This stemma differs from the one in my dissertation in one respect, viz., I here allow a generation between the ancestor of Ta, Fx, and Bo and that of Th. The change is relatively unimportant.

Ad¹—Additional MS. 9832, British Museum (1–1985).
 Ad²—Additional MS. 12524, British Museum (1640–end).
 Ad³—Additional MS. 28617, British Museum (513–610; 808–1105; fragments of 1156–1173, 1180–1192, and 1271–1280; 1306–1801; 1852–2113; 2125–2136; and 2151–end).
 P —Pepys MS. 2006, Magdalen College, Cambridge (1–1377).
 R —Rawlinson MS. C. 86, Bodleian (*Dido*, 924–1367).
 Ff —Cambridge University Library, MS. Ff. 1. 6. (*Thisbe*, 706–923).
 Fx —Fairfax MS. 16, Bodleian.
 Bo —Bodley MS. 638, Bodleian.
 Ta —Tanner MS. 346, Bodleian.
 Th —W. Thynne's printed edition, 1532.

as a group; instead, he gives lists of readings in which Tr, Ad¹, S, and Ad² as individuals (in a few cases two of them) agree with one or more of the MSS. of *k*. Thus in section 30 we are given lists of readings in which Tr agrees with the following MSS. of *k*: with P and Ff, two readings; with P and R, four; with P alone, eight; with P(+Bo), two; with R alone, two; with Ad² and Ad³, four; with Ad³ alone, eleven; and with Ad³ and Ff, one. (Notice that in only four of the above cases is Tr supported by another c MS.) Even these agreements are insignificant; Koch admits (XLIV, p. 37) that they are so trifling in nature and number that one cannot accept them as proof of close relationship.

In sec. 31 (a) similar lists are given in which S agrees with one or more of these MSS. and a list of a dozen readings in which SAd² agrees with Ad³ (Ad² begins at 1640, i.e., after P, R, and Ff break off). These lists are somewhat longer than the lists given in sec. 30, but the agreements are in general of the same non-committal nature. The only reading which particularly indicates a close relationship is that of 928: S, *Ouide*; R, *Supporte ovid*; rest, *Eneyde(-dos)*. Since Tr and Ad¹ (Ad² does not exist here) do not support S, and P and Ad³ do not support R, I regard the error as having arisen in S and R independently, probably because of the close resemblance between the capital letters O and E in fourteenth and fifteenth century manuscripts.⁴

The relationship of Ad¹ to the various MSS. of the *k*-group is argued in section 33 (a). Near the end of the section Koch

⁴ See the facsimiles of late XIVth century writing reproduced in Thompson's *Greek and Latin Palaeography*, pp. 308–9, for examples.

concludes that the readings linking Ad¹ with R, Ff, and Ad³ are without significance, but that the repeated agreements of Ad¹ and P in error cannot be put aside lightly. From these agreements he singles out two cases as of especial significance—195: Ad¹ and P, *town(e)* for *tonne*, and 1287: Ad¹ and P, *her-vest(+Ta!)* for *(h)ernest*. In comment I need only say that even a careful scribe—and a more careless scribe than that of P would be hard to find—was in constant danger of committing such blunders as the two listed above. The scribe of Ta—generally accurate—fell into the trap. See also similar confusion in lines 2083(*leve, lene*), 2086(id.), and 2353(*woned, woved*).

This completes Koch's evidence for linking *k* and *c*, except for five apparent Ad²-Ad³ agreements which he promptly dismisses as without significance. Though the aggregate is large, the trifling nature of the errors and the utter lack of agreement among the MSS. of both groups would cause one to doubt a descent of *k* from *C* as in any way probable. Indeed, because of the contradictory testimony of Tr, Ad¹, S, and Ad² in regard to the groups of readings given by Koch, one would have to assume either that these four MSS. descended from *c* independently (which is contradicted by exceedingly strong evidence), or that the scribes severally corrected these errors and thus wiped out evidence that the MSS. as a group agreed with one or more of the *k* group. Such, of course, is unthinkable. The alternative is that the agreements are due to errors made independently by individual scribes. No one who has noticed the lack of understanding of Chaucerian meter and grammar exhibited by the scribes of P, R, *k*, and S, and the deliberate tampering with the text by the scribes of the *c*-group (see next section) would be surprised to discover that two of them—or even three occasionally—agree in omitting or inserting the sign of the infinitive or the relative *that*, or of transposing two words, or of dropping a prefix or substituting a suffix. Yet it is upon agreements such as these—not of *k* and *c*, which might be of some significance, but of separate units of the two groups—that we are asked to accept proof of common ancestry. To me the evidence is decidedly inconclusive, especially when considered in connection with evidence to the contrary.

This negative evidence is of two kinds, a few striking instances in which *k* and *Gg* alone present the true reading, and a large number of evident agreements of *k* and *B* in error. The first includes the presence of the undoubtedly genuine couplet 960/61 (that the couplet is genuine is indicated by the source of the passage, *Aen.* I. 170-1) in *Gg* and *k* only, and the agreement of these two MSS. in the probably true reading of 1139:

But natholes oure autour tellith vs.
 (Fx, Bo, Ta) For to him yt was reported thus
 (Tr, Ad¹) Had gret desyre. And aftyr fell hit thus
 (S) And in his hert, than he seid rycht thus.

The two MSS. agree in yet other readings, notably 794, *haste-lykyngē*, and 1187, *thing-wyght*. Koch's stemma can explain these similarities only as due to independent errors at *c* and *B* or to the contamination of *k* from *Gg* (Koch chooses the latter interpretation); the alternative is to suspect that *k* descended from *A* along a line independent of *C*.

It is possible, of course, to explain the agreement of *Gg* and *k* in 960/61 and in 1139 as due to contamination, for both the couplet and the verse were evidently missing from the exemplar of *B* and *C* (the *b*, *c*, and *γ* readings are obviously individual attempts to supply a missing line). It is less likely that the scribe of *k* should have substituted the colorless *haste* for *lykyngē* (794) and *thing* for *wyght* (1187). But it is far simpler to regard these similarities between *Gg* and *k* as evidence of an independence of *k* and *c*, especially as the evidence for their relation is decidedly weak.

There can be only one interpretation, however, of the evidence for a close relationship of *k* and *B*. It consists of a very considerable number of *B* + *Ad³* agreements in error in the last half of the poem (see Koch, sec. 40), of a smaller number of similar errors of *B* and *k* in the first half (secs. 38-41), and of some striking similarities which Koch has overlooked in this connection, viz., the confusion of *B* and *Ad³* in vv. 2338-39 and of *B* and *P* in vv. 249 and 487. In the first of these cases *B* and *Ad³* (the only *k* MS. which has this part of the text) omit 2338, present 2339 as 2338 and introduce the same spurious line as 2339. In the second instance, *P* (the other *k* MSS. do not have this part of the text) presents spurious lines for

vv. 249 and 487, the only verses in the *Prologue* which are omitted by Fx, Bo, and Ta;⁵ the spurious lines in P clearly indicate gaps in its exemplar.

The absence of 2338 from both *B* and Ad³ and of 249 and 487 from *B* and P indicate clearly the nature of the relationship of these MSS. For even if one should grant Koch's assumption that the verbal similarities are due to contamination (which I do not grant), one surely could not grant that the absence of essential verses is due to contamination. Clearly, for the portions of the text where these gaps occur, the exemplar of Ad³ and of P must have been a *B*-type MS.

My interpretation of the position of *k* on the stemma is based upon the conviction that *k* is hybrid. Certain readings mentioned above (960-61, 1139, 794, and 1187) point to an independence of *k* of both *B* and *C*; others (2338-9, 249, and 487) are conclusive of a descent of portions of *k* from *B*. To reconcile these conflicting testimonies one should notice that of the two dozen P + *B* agreements listed by Koch (sec. 38), all but one (1357) are from the *Prologue*; that the four PR+*B* agreements (1151, 1175, 1194, and 1239) are insignificant; and that the few agreements of P+Ad³+*B* and PR+Ad³+*B* are either from the *Prologue* or from near the end of the P and R fragments (i.e., after 1300). One should notice, furthermore, that of the long list of Ad³+*B* agreements (sec. 40) only two occur before line 1300 and that these two are of no significance in themselves, *nere-ne* (997) and *she* omitted (1063). Inasmuch as R and Ff are undoubtedly members of the *k* group and—as far as their fragmentary character will allow—corroborate the evidence submitted above,⁶ I feel justified in regarding *k* as a hybrid to which a *B*-type MSS. contributed the *Prologue* and the last 1500 lines (approximately) and a MS. standing apart from both *B* and *c* the remainder. Because of the fragmentary and mutilated character of the MSS. it is impossible to determine the dividing line; it probably occurs at about line 1250. Inasmuch as the *B* MSS. frequently err when the '*B*'

⁵ Curiously enough, these four MSS. figure in similar errors in *The Temple of Glass* (which immediately precedes the *Legend* in P.) P presents three spurious lines to take the places of gaps in Fx, Bo, and Ta, and omits one other line which is also missing from them. (See Schick, ed.—E. E. T. S.—p. xx.)

⁶ See p. 29 ff. of my dissertation.

portion of *k* does not (see my dissertation, pp. 20-21, 47-8), I conclude that that portion sprang not directly from *B* but from a point between *a* and *B*.

2. *The question of contamination*

Koch's stemma differs from mine also in that Koch indicates by broken and dotted lines secondary and, in some cases, even tertiary influences upon most of the MSS. We have already seen that the bifurcated broken line connecting *B* with *k* and *Ad³* should indicate kinship instead of contamination, and that the dotted line from *Gg* to *k* and *k̄* is probably fictitious. It remains for us to examine the evidence for the contamination of the other MSS.

Contamination is likely to occur when an intelligent and conscientious scribe, working from an obviously faulty exemplar, has access to another MS. It is reasonable to assume that such a person would adopt the alternative reading only when it is actually or plausibly better than that of the exemplar. Stupid, careless blunders in two MSS. not genealogically akin are not likely to be indications of contamination; such similarities are more likely to be coincidence. Thus, Thynne's printed text is a normal example of the process. It contains the earmarks of *B*—its basic MS.—but has obviously been corrected (or "contaminated") from at least one other MS. For Thynne has filled in all the gaps except the elusive 960/61 (though he omits a couplet present in all the MSS.), printed the genuine as well as the spurious 2339, combined the readings of *a* and *B* at 1172 and 2452, obtained the correct spelling of *Alcathoe* (1902, 1923), secured the only acceptable reading of 2422 (*Chorus*), and inserted the name of *Livi* (perhaps from a marginal gloss) in 1721. On the other hand, there are about a dozen minor cases which Koch regards as evidence of an influence from *Gg*: 217/63, *Laodomia-laudomia*, etc.; 856, *y-fyndefynde*; 2615, *of soun(de)* omitted by *b* (Tr, *of son and of*, *Ad², of sowne and*, S lost); 1607, *b* omits *the* (*Gg* and Th awkward); 1639, Th and *Gg*, *lefe or lothe*, rest, *ne for or*; 1727, *so long-to long*; 2365, *her susters loue- hir suster love*; 2656, *to bedde go-to bed* (*y-go*); 1071, *brawne-brawnes*; 1132, *to present-for to present*; 2126, *now* omitted by Th and *Gg* [but *Gg* also *Al* for *And*]. These agreements I regard as due to coincidence. If

Thynne had had access to a Gg type MS., possessing not only a unique *Prologue* but also many excellent, unique readings, we should find in Thynne's text much more striking similarities than those quoted above.

Koch's evidence of contamination of Ta from Gg is equally weak. It consists of eleven readings, of which Koch selects three as of special significance—638, Gg and Ta, *heterly*, S *hatirly*, rest, *hertely*; 1585, *fals* omitted by Fx, Bo, and Th; 738, *cop* (Gg, Ff, Ta) for *top*. The first of these is merely a mistake in spelling; the last may be explained as independent errors of the three scribes because of the similarity of "c" and "t" in most manuscripts; the other looks like a Ta emendation, though not necessarily from Gg. Surely such errors are far from being proof of contamination of Ta from Gg. To be consistent Koch's stemma should show broken lines connecting Ta with S and Ad³ because they read *huge* for *mech* or *gret(e)* in 1613, and from Ta to Ad¹ and P because of the mutual error of *hervest* for *(h)ernest* in 1287, etc. If the scribe of Ta had had Gg at his elbow, we should have expected far more significant agreements than the few cited by Koch.

The so-called contamination of the c MSS. is of two types, a number of clear cases of editing of individual MSS.—c, S, and Ad² (and possibly of Tr)—and a large number of minor similarities between MSS. not genealogically related—Tr and S, Ad¹ and S, etc. In the first group are such readings as the following from c: *All the Cyte* (1902, 1923) for the strange word *Alcathoe* (probably misspelled in the exemplar), *For ever and ay* (1926, 1941) for the practically synonymous *From yer to yer*, and probably (though Ad¹ ends at 1985) *pryncipally* for the older *aldermost* (2127, 2567, 2635). In the same category I would place the strange free paraphrases of the couplets 1772-3, 2543-2544, and 2696-2697 of Ad² (see my dissertation, p. 10). Though these readings are valueless in themselves, they indicate that the scribes of these MSS. exercised editorial prerogatives. Consequently, when I find in c a reading such as *thus lat I ryde* (1210)—the other MSS. stumble over the line—I am more inclined to regard it as a happy guess at the truth than as having come from a MS. which stood apart from the existing MSS., especially as it is the only case in which this MS. alone presents an acceptable reading. In the same manner

I regard the S reading of 1538 (S adds *almychti* before *God*), a line which is short in all other MSS. except Gg (Gg clearly emends);⁷ for the scribe of S was given to emending for meter.

The important variations mentioned above are individual peculiarities and do not involve the question of the relationship of the existing MSS. The longer lists of minor "contaminations" cited by Koch, however, tend to upset the established genealogy of the c MSS. Though space forbids the examination of more than one group of these readings, I have selected for the purpose the longest and by far the most formidable looking group—the agreements of Ad¹ and S.

Of the relationship of Tr and Ad¹ there can be no doubt; they agree in omitting two couplets, in inverting another, and in presenting a very large number of erroneous readings, many of them striking (see my dissertation, pp. 24-5). Yet Koch gives a list of about half a hundred readings in which Ad¹ agrees with S in minor errors in which Tr does not share. The list may be analyzed as follows. Three must be deducted as Koch's errors—193, 1263 (*It als wele*), and 1886. In at least two cases Tr does not contradict S and Ad¹ because it is otherwise corrupt—1029, Tr omits *it* (Ad¹ and S, *is it for it is*); 1907, Tr omits *an* (Ad¹ and S *on* for *an*). In another case (1729) the B MSS. agree with Ad¹ and S in reading *as for with* (Tr, *ys*). Three lines—1193, 1207, and 1263—are listed twice. In a few cases Ad¹ and S are evidently trying to get metrical lines, for Tr is either corrupt or would appear so to many scribes: e.g., 52, 96, 186, 303, 652, 1009, 1119, 1837, and (Ad¹) 1121. Several other cases consist of substitutions of one form of a word for another, a singular for a plural, the past tense for the present, differences in spelling, etc.; thus, 68/80, *be-beth*; 86, *within (+Th)-in with* (*P, In*); 155, *for-of*; 136/150, *obseruance (+Th)-obseruaunces*; 257/331, *to drawe* (Tr, *wtdrawe*)-*withdrawe*; 374, *tirandis(des-tyrauntis*; 455, *vpon-on*; 688, *counand(S)*, *cownaunt(Ad¹)-covenant*; 693 (id.); 981, *In-to(S)*, *in(Ad¹)-to in*; 1123, *lubye* (S, Ad¹), *lyby(Tr)-libie*; 1193, *ben al(PR, alle ben)-ys(is) al*; 1796, *had-hath*; 1566, *repreued-repreueth*; 1871, *halowed-yhalwed*. In 704 *thus* may have been caught independently from the

⁷ Koch calls attention to a second case in which S alone appears to present an acceptable reading—337/61, S, *away for algate* (Gg, *alwey*, *P, allewey*). To my mind *away* is clearly a mistake or an emendation.

preceding line, and in 1398 *And* from the following. In a few cases the sign of the infinitive has been inserted by both scribes: 1407, *to (ben)*; 1917, *quhom to(S), ells to(Ad¹)-ellis*. [One needs more than a vivid imagination to regard the last as an indication of contamination.] In two cases what may appear to be substitution of words may be mistakes in spelling: 13, *seith-seeth*; 837, *biding-bidding*. Two cases are easy transpositions—1193, *ben al* and 916, *piramus and Tisbe*. The context clearly invites substitution in 155, *for-of*; 1437, *with(repeated)*; 194, *and-or*; 469, *and-or*; 879, *or-and*; and 783, *at-in*.

Of the entire list only three or four cases are in any way worthy of serious attention—85, *gyeth-wynt*; 1207, *gyse(de-gyse)-wyse*; and 1401, *realme-regne*. In addition Koch should have noted that in 454 S and Ad¹ read *God* for *Go(o)*. In the first three cases S and Ad¹ probably present the readings which were in *c*, whereas Tr substituted the more modern form or synonym. In 454 either Tr corrected or S and Ad¹ erred independently (*Goo* and *God* are not very unlike).

In thus looking microscopically at such a list of agreements one is very likely to lose sight of the woods for the trees. Let us consider the possible explanations of these agreements. (I) They cannot be explained as having descended to S and Ad¹ from a common ancestor apart from Tr, for the evidence binding Tr and Ad¹ and S and Ad² is incontrovertible. (II) They are too insignificant to be charged to contamination: if either S or Ad¹ had had access to the other, or both to another MS., we should expect to find some more significant similarities. (III) The errors may have occurred in *c* but were corrected by the scribe of Tr. This would account for some of the more obvious errors. (IV) They may be independent transcriptional errors of S and Ad¹. This I believe to be true of most of them, particularly as the agreements are of such a nature as one is likely to find between any two MSS. not closely related. (The readings submitted by Koch as evidence of relationship of these MSS. to *k* are of the same general nature—see preceding section.) To regard either these minor similarities or the cases of ‘editing’ cited above as proof of contamination from a point between *A* and *O* is both unnecessary and unwarranted.

3. *The nature of "A"*

Whether the hypothetical *A* was Chaucer's original manuscript or a manuscript removed a generation or more from the matrix cannot be definitely ascertained. The considerable number of clear cases in which the MSS. are linked in error suggests a common origin removed from Chaucer's copy.

But this apparently obvious interpretation of these mutual errors presents some difficulties. It assumes, first, that *A* contained the two versions of the *Prologue*, one of which was taken by *Gg* and the other by *a*. The difficulty of accepting this explanation arises from two sources—the improbability of a scribe's transcribing two long passages which almost duplicate each other; and the probability of contamination, especially since some imperfections of the *Gg* text would invite comparison with the other. (Koch recognizes these difficulties and suggests the possibility that *A* contained only the *Gg* version and that the other came into *a* through the hypothetical *y*.)

Moreover, one must remember that inasmuch as the poem was never completed, it is unlikely that it was put into circulation as a whole—if at all—during Chaucer's life-time. It is possible, of course, that individual legends, or the *Prologue* and one or more legends as a unit, were put into circulation—two such MSS. have come down to us (*Ff*, *Thisbe* and *R*, *Dido*). Such transcriptions might later form the basis of a composite text. But the agreement of the MSS. in the order of the legends, though only that of the first is stated by the context, and the conclusive evidence furnished by a collation of the text indicate that if such transcriptions influenced our MSS. at all, they did not do so at a point later than *A*.

That Chaucer did not 'publish' the poem is further suggested by the unfinished state of *Hypermnestra*, the last of the legends. The legend breaks off abruptly with these words:

This tale is seid for this conclusion.

Each of the other tales has its 'conclusion,' varying in length from a couplet to six or seven lines. It is inconceivable that Chaucer did not write the few lines necessary to finish the legend. Either these lines were on a separate sheet which became detached from Chaucer's MS. before a transcript was

made or they were lost in transmission. The former is the more likely, for Chaucer's MS. was probably a pile of loose leaves whereas a transcript would be a bound codex.

Furthermore, if *A* represents Chaucer's own MS., rather than a transcript, we can account for the few striking cases of agreement in erroneous readings and of confusion in all MSS. as due to inaccuracies and confusion in a working copy. There are a few cases in which it is pretty certain that Chaucer left verses metrically or logically unsound: the sources of 1338 (hexametrical) and of 1966 (*Of Athenys falsely*) indicate clearly that Chaucer nodded.⁸ It is not unlikely that other such cases exist, but for which no evidence can be discovered. Some of the other inaccurate or imperfect verses may be accounted for as due to corrections and substitutions written between the lines or on the margins of his working copy—1126 and 1210, for instance. If in addition to *A*, there was also an 'O,' an 'x,' and a 'y,'—as Koch suggests—I doubt whether we should find the two types of MSS. agreeing quite so often in regard to some of these obviously inaccurate lines. Consequently, though one cannot be dogmatic on the subject, I am inclined to regard *A* as a pile of manuscript in Chaucer's desk drawer at his death, rather than a bound codex in circulation.

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⁸ See my dissertation, pp. 42, 43.